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No. 111

HOW LONG HAVE I TO LIVE.

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"HOW LONG HAVE I TO LIVE?"*

A serious question, reader, and one which demands serious reflection. Will you give it, while I answer?

1. A VERY SHORT TIME. The author of life has written not less legibly in your experience than in his word, that "man that is born of a woman is of few days." When you shall die is his secret, but so emphatically is the truth uttered, so deeply impressed upon the things with which you are most familiar, that you can scarcely turn your eye upon an object in nature that does not remind you of the brevity of human life. The flower that blooms by the wayside, and the grass upon which you tread, the falling leaf, and the shadow in the sunshine, are emblems of man's frailty. "He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down"—"His days are as grass"—"In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withereth."—"We all do fade as a leaf," and man in the glory of his wisdom and his strength "fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." The changing seasons remind us that a solemn change awaits us not far hence. The closing year, shortening as we grow older, tells of a closing life, of a sick chamber, a cold shroud, a narrow coffin—of a yawning grave—of the transi-

ing of feet around it, and the silence in which the dead are left.

Not only brief is life, but what there is passes with the speed of the lightning. Job says, "my days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" ever moving, yet so rapidly that you cannot keep your eye upon it. Again he says, "my days are swifter than a post; they are passed away as the swift ships—as the eagle that hasteth to its prey"—the king's messenger that brooks no delay—the ship driven by mighty winds—the hungry eagle darting upon its victim. The testimony of the Psalmist is that "we spend our years as a tale that is told."

And not only so, but what is more *uncertain* than life? Who has the assurance of one hour hence? You may be young, and looking forward to years in the future, but upon what are your calculations based? Has He who holds your life in His hand, told you that you shall reach old age, or that you shall not die this year, that this night your soul shall not be required of you? No. Does the history of the past teach it, does your own observation justify the bold presumption? Go into any cemetery, read upon the tombs the ages of those who sleep beneath them, and how does the number diminish as you go from childhood to youth, to manhood, to middle life, and thence to old age; and as it is with the living, so is it with the dead, but here and there one who reached but three score years and ten. The most vigorous constitution, the most careful preservation of health furnish no cer-

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tain safeguard against the inroads of disease and death. If not exposed to one form, you are to another. If sickness does not pale your cheek, and waste your strength, you are still surrounded by the ministers of the destroyer. There are clouds for the fairest morning, and around the brightest prospects of a mutual life is hung the drapery of the tomb.

But what if life were secured to you, and you could know that you should reach the limit appointed to man, three score years and ten, it is still a short time that you have to live. What are they, or four score years, or a century? You will soon be there, and what then? Like him whose words suggest these thoughts, you will find yourself dying by inches, sense after sense departing, and death no less dreadful when he does his work by piece meal. Of this, however, there is no assurance, and the probabilities preponderate the other way. Our hearts teach us a different lesson—our tears witness against our hope—the air is plighted with the sighs of the living for the early dead, and every heart confesses to the experience of the royal preacher that life is the perfection of vanities.

How long have I to live?

2. A VERY LONG TIME. It is a wonderful thought that man shall live forever—that he must live and live and outlive all in nature that shall perish. This life is but the first step in your existence, but the infancy of your being. True, the body shall die—“The dust shall return to the earth

as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it." Our first parents, and Cain, the first murderer, and Abel the first victim, are living yet, and Enoch and Noah, and the wicked people of his day, and Abráham, and David, and Paul, and Pilate, the dead of every age, the evil and the good, are living now just over the line that crosses every human path, and shall live forever more.

The idea of an eternal existence involves more of interest to man than all other thoughts combined. It associates with it that of perpetual enjoyment or suffering. When I am told that I am destined ever to live in the possession of my faculties and sensibilities, and that as a spiritual being, they are to be refined to a degree of which, in my present state, I can form no conception, it becomes a matter of momentous importance to me, and should awaken intense solicitude. God and his attributes are at once the objects of cautious contemplation. As an immortal being, bearing to him the relation of a creature, it greatly concerns me to know what He is, and what is my destiny. Heaven and Hell rouse my hopes or my fears, as they could not, but for the personal interest which my deathless nature gives me in them. To one or the other I hasten, there to begin an unknown life. Eternity! What is it. How shall we define it. With what shall we compare it. Who can grasp the thought conveyed in that single word. Earthly dialects are all too meagre to describe it, and our minds too contracted to receive it. Could I command the tongue of every

nation and of every tribe, and use the boldest figures, and group around me images the most extravagant, it would be less than the feeble struggling of an ant beneath the tread of a mammoth. Eternity! It is the life time of God, the destiny of every human being. It is an affecting thought, my fellow-pilgrim to eternity, that in a little while you will be dead. The wind will be sighing through the grass upon your grave its mournful dirge, your voice will be heard no more; your form forgotten, and your name unbreathed, for those that love you will be dead too. But when careless feet shall tread upon your dust, and the mould cover the inscription chiselled upon your tomb, you shall still *live*—where, oh, *where*, and *how*? All things connected with this life have an end. Your joys and your sorrows, they shall end. Your cares and your pursuits, your prosperity and your afflictions, there is a point where they all terminate. The heart, brimfull of sorrow, shall cease to ache; the eyes that weep, will shed their last tear, and the weary will rest. Ambition, and avarice, and pleasure shall end, and all beneath the sky. Death will seize his last victim, and have no more work to do, and Time itself shall be no more: But Eternity knows no waste, no end. Its future duration shall be your own. Here man lives for a brief season, and is seen no more, there his existence is stable as the throne of its sovereign. Here he wears the bonds of death, there the robe of immortality.

From this view a most interesting question, and

one which my reader has probably anticipated, arises. If this existence is to be mine, what is to be my state. The gospel reveals two conditions, one of bliss, the other of wretchedness, one of glory, the other of despair. To one or the other you are an heir. Heaven or hell is yours. If to Calvary you have gone, and laid the burden of a guilty nature at the feet of Him who bore the sins of many—if those lips in the tenderness of divine love have said “go in peace,” then yours is the inheritance of the saints in light. Be faithful unto death and He will give you a crown of life—a crown that shall sparkle with gems richer than the diamonds of Kings—more precious than the most costly jewelry of earth.

But if Christ be not your hope—if you have not been washed in his blood which cleanseth us from all sin—if you have not made your peace with God through faith in His Son, an Eternity of unutterable agony is yours. The pangs of the second death await you, and you cannot escape them but by making the cross of Jesus the refuge of your soul. I come to invite you to go with me there, and be a child of God.

Which of these states shall be yours and mine, dear reader, will be settled soon. There is a last year that we shall live. There is coming, if it has not come already, a last Sabbath. You will soon hear the last sermon. The preacher will soon utter his last admonition, and the grave will close over us. Days will dawn and darken, and be succeeded

by other days, and years will pass, and we shall sleep in our lonely chambers, but this *immortality*, where shall it dwell. What shall be its state.

God help us here to live for Christ, that hereafter we may live *with* Christ forever.

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